

Columbine Health Systems Center for Healthy Aging
Colorado State University
151 W. Lake St., Suite 1400
Fort Collins, CO 80525

January 25, 2023

To the members of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee:

We hope you will accept this written testimony from the leadership team of Colorado State University's Columbine Health Systems Center for Healthy Aging in favor of Senate Bill 31.

A [2021 report](#) from the Association of American Medical Colleges indicates that by 2034, the United States will face a shortage of 37,800 to 124,000 physicians across specialties; and given the expected rates of [population aging](#) in the near future, we know that older adults will be disproportionately affected by a shortage of geriatrics-trained physicians.

Overall, 4% of social workers, 2.6% of advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs), and less than 1% of RNs, PAs, and pharmacists are certified in geriatrics. SB-031 would ensure that health care professionals across disciplines would be trained in geriatric care as well as work together to coordinate care for older adults across their health care teams. Interdisciplinary geriatric care is shown to reduce over prescribing of medications, reduce hospital stays as well as help to keep older Coloradans in their homes, and out of long-term care facilities if not medically necessary.

We support this bill because:

- Colorado has one of the fastest growing populations in the country of people 65+, nearing 1m million over the next decade.
- Currently there are only 99 geriatricians in Colorado, and by 2050 we need nearly 300 geriatricians to serve 10% of Coloradans 65+. To serve 30% of Coloradans aged 65+, we need 867 more geriatricians.
- This statistic is even worse for rural Coloradans. 50% of the population 75+ live in rural areas and less than 10% of geriatric specialists serve these areas.
- Goal #1 of Colorado's current State Plan on Aging states that "Older Coloradans have opportunities to remain active, healthy, engaged and independent." We can't fulfill this goal if older Coloradans do not have access to appropriate geriatric-specific healthcare.

SB23-031 will:

- Provide multidisciplinary team training across clinical disciplines to provide geriatric care to Colorado's most frail and medically complex older Coloradans.
- Recruit geriatric-trained clinicians to rural and underserved areas of Colorado that have typically been difficult to fill these much-needed providers.



- Allow a very important “multiplier effect”: that participating clinicians will not only deliver geriatric care to these communities, but they will also provide much needed geriatric training sites to help educate the next generation of geriatric providers in multiple fields.

As a director of a multi-disciplinary training clinic focused on serving older adults (Aging Clinic of the Rockies), I can tell you that multidisciplinary training is beneficial to individuals, families, the state of Colorado, and society as a whole. It allows the right person to address each issue our older adults face in as timely a manner as possible. Not only does this benefit the older adult whom we serve, it saves the state unimaginable funds by keeping older adults out of emergency rooms and by connecting them with federally funded programs that already exist to serve them but are not being used because of the lack of multidisciplinary clinics/teams in the state that would be able to help them navigate these services.

As educators, researchers, and clinicians dedicated to promoting successful and healthy aging, we urge you to pass SB23-031 and support geriatrics training for health care professionals across disciplines to reduce health care expenditures and provide quality and appropriate health care for older Coloradans.

Thank you,

Nicole Ehrhart, V.M.D, M.S., Director

Deana Davalos, Ph.D., Associate Director; Director, Aging Clinic of the Rockies

Karyn Hamilton, R.D., Ph.D., Associate Director



Public Health & Environment

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Dear Members of the Colorado State Senate Health and Human Services Committee,

I am writing to express my support for Senate Bill 23-031 that would create the Colorado multidisciplinary health-care provider access training program. As our population ages in all counties of the state, it is increasingly important that we have healthcare professionals who are specifically trained to address the unique medical needs of older adults. As the Manager of Eagle County's Healthy Aging program, serving older adults in the Eagle River and Roaring Fork valleys of Eagle County, I have over 10 years of experience working with our older adults.

This legislation is particularly important for rural areas in Colorado, such as Eagle County, where access to quality and age-appropriate healthcare can be limited. Many older adults in rural communities have to travel long distances over sometimes dangerous roads to receive specialty and geriatric medical care, as many do not have local access to specialists who can provide the care they need. By creating the Colorado multidisciplinary health-care provider access training program, we can hopefully increase the number of healthcare professionals in rural areas who are equipped to provide high-quality care for older adults.

Geriatric care specialists play an important role in helping older adults to live independently for as long as possible and ensure that our older residents continue to be an integral, contributive population in our communities. Geriatric-specific care providers can help prevent and manage chronic health conditions, such as diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease, that are common among older adults. They can also provide support and guidance to older adults and their caregivers, helping to alleviate the burden of caregiving and improve the quality of life for older adults.

In addition to the many services we provide to our clients, we also play a role in advocating for improved access to medical services and specialty care. We are continuously hearing from our clients the many difficulties in accessing the care they need. That said, I strongly urge you to support this legislation, which will help to improve the health and well-being of older adults in Colorado. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Carly Rietmann, MPH

Healthy Aging Manager

Eagle County Public Health and Environment



POLICY STATEMENT

Due to lived experience, community health workers who hold LGBTQ+ identities are able to provide culturally-relevant and identity-affirming care to members of the LGBTQ+ community in the areas of disease prevention and health promotion. By allowing community health workers to reimburse services through Medicaid or Medicare, they are better able to provide affordable mental health and transition-related service options to LGBTQ+ Coloradans.

SB23-002 promotes and incentivizes individuals with lived experiences to enter the community health work field, as well as seeks stakeholder input regarding training and skills-based requirements. Envision:You strongly supports Senate Bill 23-002 to ensure Medicaid Reimbursement for Community Health Services.

Senate Bill 23-002 Medicaid Reimbursement for Community Health Services

The proposed bill authorizes the Department of Health Care Policy and Financing to seek federal authorization from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid services to provide medicaid reimbursement for community health social work services. A community health social worker is defined as serving as a liaison between health-care providers or social service providers and community members in order to facilitate access to physical, mental, or dental health-related services, or services to combat social determinants of health, and who improves the quality and cultural competence of health-related service delivery. The bill also requires four public stakeholder meetings to solicit input on considerations to be included in the state department's request for federal authorization. The department must also include a report and presentation on how community health workers are being utilized through Medicaid to the joint budget committee at the "State Measurement for Accountable, Responsive, and Transparent (SMART) Government Act" hearing on or before January 31, 2026.

Why it Matters

Health First Colorado (Colorado's Medicaid Program) provides public health insurance for low-income individuals with monthly incomes under \$1,305 and families of four under \$2,688. According to Envision:You's State of the State Survey Report that surveyed over 500 LGBTQ+ Colorado residents, 15% of respondents utilized Medicaid for health insurance. According to One Colorado's 2018 report "Closing the Gap: The Turning Point for LGBTQ+ Health", 20% of transgender respondents are covered by Medicaid, which includes comprehensive

transition-related care. LGBTQ+ individuals continue to experience mental health concerns and substance use disorders at significantly higher rates than their non-LGBTQ+ counterparts. Community mental health workers who hold LGBTQ+ identities are able to provide care that is more culturally relevant due to their personal lived experiences, highlighting the need to expand the community health workforce. The positive impact of culturally relevant care in community health settings can be seen through the efforts of Community Heart Health Action for Latinos At-risk Program and the Colorado Heart Healthy Solutions program.

Community mental health workers are valuable, trusted, resources that help many Coloradans navigate social services and health care systems. Their role serves in preventing the onset or progression of disease, disability, and other health conditions as well as promoting physical, dental, and behavioral health. Participants in Envision: You's [State of the State Survey Report](#) noted that the amount of time and energy necessary to figure out insurance or Medicaid coverage, determine the kinds of care covered and associated costs, and to complete necessary paperwork are prohibitive of care seeking, particularly for those who are in crisis or immediate need. Research on community health worker interventions that address unmet social needs for historically marginalized populations found that every dollar invested in the intervention returns \$2.47 to an average medicaid payer within a fiscal year.

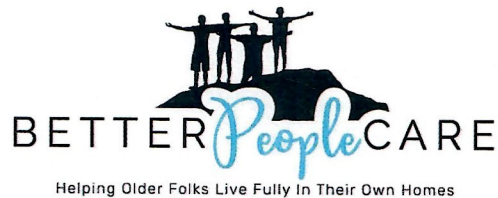
SB23-002 supports the work of community health workers and will expand access to care for many LGBTQ+ Coloradans who receive care through Medicaid or Medicare. The bill also outlines that public stakeholder meetings prior to federal authorization will seek input regarding the importance of training and skills-based experience requirements as minimum qualifications for community health workers, which satisfies requirements outlined in existing legislation HB22-1267 Culturally Relevant Training Health Professionals.

For these reasons, Envision:You strongly supports Senate Bill 23-002 for Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement for community health social work services.

Envision:You

Envision:You seeks to close gaps in behavioral health outcomes for LGBTQ+ individuals through co-created community programming, advocacy engagement, public awareness campaigns, and evidence-based training. To learn more please visit: www.envision-you.org.

For more information, please contact Steven Haden at steven.haden@envision-you.org.



January 25, 2023

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am writing to testify in support of Senate Bill 31, because it is a move in the right direction of helping our health care professionals become more highly trained in the area of healthcare for our older folks.

As an Occupational Therapist, DAWN Dementia Care Specialist/Trainer/Consultant, and the Founder and Director of Better People Care, I witness regularly the harm done for older folks when the professionals in the healthcare system do not have the understanding and training in the particular needs of older adults.

As the SB 31 states, the need for elder-focused, elder-specialist care is increasing in Colorado, and as the Bill promotes, we must do a better job of meeting their healthcare needs in ways that best match their needs.

Many thanks,

Jill Couch, MS, OT/L

DAWN Dementia Care Specialist/Trainer/Consultant

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Connected **for Life**

January 26, 2023

Dear Chair Fields and Health and Human Services Committee Members,

The American Diabetes Association (ADA) is writing to urge your support for Senate Bill 23-002, which would authorize the state to seek authorization for Medicaid reimbursement for community health workers.

Community Health Workers (CHW) play a critical role in helping patients manage their disease. A study found that when CHWs worked with patients they improved their glycemic or blood sugar control and reduced their healthcare use. In addition, there was self-reported improvement including more physical activity and better nutrition.¹ By helping people better manage diabetes we can reduce their risk of developing complications, decrease hospitalizations, and improve health outcomes.

As cited in the ADA'S Standards of Medical Care for Diabetes-2023, CHWs are also beneficial in helping patients with prediabetes reduce the risk of developing diabetes and "may facilitate the adoption of behavior changes for diabetes prevention while bridging barriers related to social determinants of health."² We know that diabetes prevalence is inversely related to household income level, with the poorest communities seeing the highest rates of diabetes.³ Adding Medicaid reimbursement for community health workers can have a positive impact on communities that are disproportionately impacted by diabetes.

Diabetes is an epidemic across the country. In Colorado, approximately 311,554 people (about 6.9% of the adult population) have been diagnosed with diabetes. An estimated 39,839 people in Colorado are newly diagnosed every year. Diabetes costs the state of Colorado approximately \$2.6 billion a year.⁴ The ADA supports broader reimbursement for CHWs through Medicaid, which will lead to further deployment of CHW interventions for people with diabetes or at risk of diabetes to help address this epidemic. We urge your support of Senate Bill 23-002.

Sincerely,

Carissa Kemp
Director, State Government Affairs

¹ <https://www.thecommunityguide.org/news/community-health-workers-help-patients-manage-diabetes.html>

² https://diabetesjournals.org/care/article/46/Supplement_1/S41/148039/3-Prevention-or-Delay-of-Type-2-Diabetes-and

³ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4021012/>

⁴ https://diabetes.org/sites/default/files/2021-10/ADV_2021_State_Fact_sheets_Colorado.pdf